

WARM UP

1 Can you remember what the weather is like in the different parts of the USA?

HURRICANES AND TORNADOES

The varied weather conditions in the USA include severe events such as hurricanes and tornadoes. There are various agencies which monitor these occurrences and warn the population in advance. They also offer advice on how to prepare for an emergency situation in these climatic conditions, for example how to organise a survival kit with food, water and other essential items.

Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale

Category	Sustained Winds
1	119-153 km/h
2	154-177 km/h
3 (major)	178-208 km/h
4 (major)	209-251 km/h
5 (major)	252 km/h or higher

Source: <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutsshws.php>

Hurricanes

The areas of the USA which are subject to hurricanes – a type of tropical cyclone – are the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts, where the hurricane seasons last from 1st June to 30th November and 15th May to 30th November respectively. A tropical cyclone is a system of rotating clouds and thunderstorms which form in tropical and subtropical areas, such as the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico and southern Atlantic Ocean. To be classified as a hurricane, a tropical cyclone has winds of at least 119 kph and the **Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale*** classifies a hurricane on a scale from 1 to 5. The high winds, together with the heavy rainfall, flooding and storm surges associated with hurricanes, can cause extensive damage not only to coastal areas but also several hundred kilometres inland.

Enhanced Fujita Scale

Category	Sustained Winds
EF 0	65-85 mph
EF 1	86-110 mph
EF 2	111-135 mph
EF 3	136-165 mph
EF 4	166-200 mph
EF 5	Over 200 mph

Tornadoes

Tornadoes, or twisters as they are sometimes called, are violently rotating columns of air which extend from a thunderstorm to the ground, and are most common in the central states of the USA, such as Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. This area has been nicknamed ‘Tornado Alley’, but tornadoes can actually hit almost anywhere in the USA. There are an average of 1,200 tornadoes every year, with most occurring in spring and summer.

As it is impossible to measure the wind speed inside a tornado, the method of classification is based on the amount of damage that has been caused and from that the average wind speed is calculated.

An EF5 tornado on the **Enhanced Fujita Scale*** would cause incredible and devastating damage to trees, homes, buildings and people. The path of a tornado can damage an area measuring as much as 1.5 km wide by 80 km long.

ACTIVITIES

READING COMPREHENSION

2 Read the texts and decide if hurricanes (H) or tornadoes (T) or both (B)...

- 1 have a classification system
- 2 happen most often in the central states
- 3 happen most often in coastal areas
- 4 usually happen in spring
- 5 occur over 1,000 times a year
- 6 form in tropical and subtropical areas
- 7 can create floods
- 8 can damage areas as long as 80 km

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Storm Chasers

When the skies grow dark and a tornado is seen on the horizon, Jeff Shardell drives his modified Yukon vehicle directly towards the terrifying event. In one day he got within 100 yards of one twister, saw four other tornadoes, and lived to tell the story. He is a storm chaser, one of thousands of people around the United States who pursue tornadoes for recreation or profit. Part of their reward is the incredible sensation of seeing a dramatic, lightning-illuminated spiral destroying everything in its path, and part of it is the pursuit itself. 'There are moments when you say "Why am I doing this?"', said Shardell.

The storm chasers' mecca is the flat prairies of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska, where more than a third of all US tornadoes develop. During peak season chasers can literally see the storm clouds rolling in from miles away. Todd Thorn, owner of Storm Chasing Adventure Tours, takes tourists on a tornado hunt across the prairies of Tornado Alley. 'It's beautiful when it's open grassland – the lightning inside the cloud, the different colors in the sky, the shape of the tornado second by second,' said

Thorn, 46, from Montana. Thorn's six-day, \$2,600 tours attract people from as far away as England and Australia. Thorn guarantees that his tornado tourists will see severe thunderstorms, but not necessarily a tornado. And he says it is safe because they stay on the back side of the funnel. But storm-chasing can be dangerous. Some chasers wear helmets. Steve Miller, who lives in a suburb of Oklahoma City, wears shatterproof sunglasses to protect his eyes. Miller's closest call was near Throckmorton, Texas, in 2002, when a tornado dropped down from the sky directly on top of his vehicle. Luckily he was not seriously injured.

According to Miller, the most dangerous part of the pursuit is not the storm, but the number of other chasers. Thanks to movies such as *Twister* and television shows such as *Storm Chasers*, the idea of chasing storms has become glamorous. 'It's insane now,' Miller said. 'Our biggest threat is other drivers out there in the rain.'

Source: <http://uk.reuters.com>

READING COMPREHENSION

3 **PET** Read the article and choose the correct option.

- In this article, the writer wants to talk about...
 - the damage tornadoes cause.
 - the passion for following tornadoes.
 - the best way to survive a tornado.
 - the TV programmes and movies about storm chasers.
- Storm chasers prefer the flat, grasslands because...
 - there are more tourists than in other states.
 - there are fewer tornadoes than in other places.
 - they can see easily a tornado developing from a long distance.
 - the tornadoes are less dangerous than in other areas.
- What does Todd Thorn say to tourists on his tours?
 - You will definitely see very bad storms on the trip.
 - You will definitely see a tornado on the trip.
 - You must wear protective helmets and glasses.
 - You must pay for your trip six days in advance.
- Because of TV programmes and films about storm chasing, today...
 - there are fewer storm chasers than before.
 - there are more storm chasers than before.
 - storm chasers earn more money.
 - storm chasers are recognised by the public.
- What might a storm chaser say about chasing storms?
 - 'Not many people share this same hobby or job.'
 - 'You can earn lots of money.'
 - 'It's a very glamorous career and you can get on TV.'
 - 'It's sometimes dangerous but always exhilarating.'

SPEAKING

4 In small groups, discuss the following statement, saying whether you agree or disagree and why.

'Being a storm chaser is exciting and I'd love to go on a trip chasing storms in Tornado Alley.'